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THE DARK TOWER ~THE GUNSLINGER~

MARVEL
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1 of 5

ROBIN FURTH
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2010

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THE JOURNEY BEGINS

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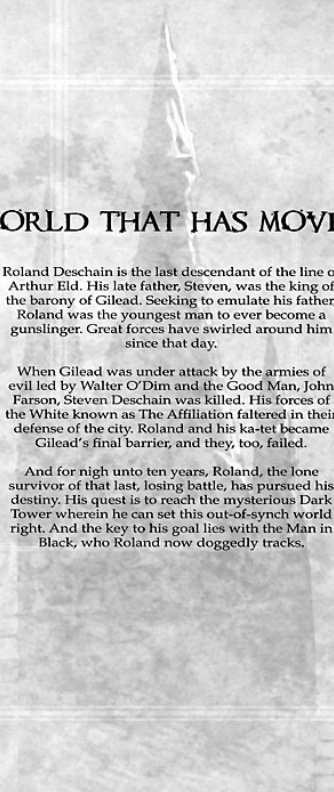
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IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

Roland Deschain is the last descendant of the line of Arthur Eld. His late father, Steven, was the king of the barony of Gilead. Seeking to emulate his father,

Roland was the youngest man to ever become a gunslinger. Great forces have swirled around him since that day.

When Gilead was under attack by the armies of evil led by Walter O'Dim and the Good Man, John Farson, Steven Deschain was killed. His forces of the White known as The Affiliation faltered in their defense of the city. Roland and his ka-tet became Gilead's final barrier, and they, too, failed.

And for nigh unto ten years, Roland, the lone survivor of that last, losing battle, has pursued his destiny. His quest is to reach the mysterious Dark Tower wherein he can set this out-of-synch world right. And the key to his goal lies with the Man in Black, who Roland now doggedly tracks.



*See this now.
See it well.*

*A man, dressed all in ebony,
sprinting across a white,
blinding and waterless desert.*



*He makes deep noises in his
throat, do ya not hear them?*

*Might be the ragged despair of
a rabbit approaching its limits.*

*Might be the chuckling of a
fox planning to turn the
tables on his hunter.*





I posed all these 'might be's' a long, long while back. Several lifetimes ago, it seems. And it occurs to me that I never actually gave no answers.

Long past time to set that omission to rights, it seems to me. So I won't keep ya waitin' any longer.



It's the latter.



The fox speaks with a voice like a rusty squeezebox.

Nice and dry with a steady breeze.

Should burn well.

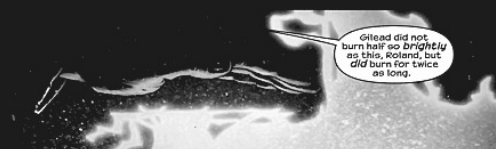
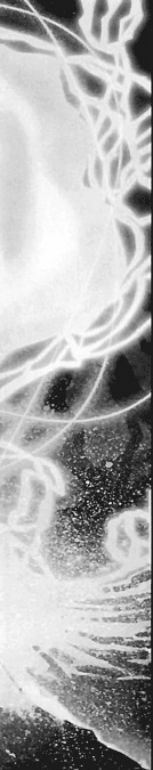


It was devil-grass, of course, the only thing out there that would burn.

It burned with a greasy, flat light and it burned slow, and it's said devils lived in the flames.

Never seen it m'self, and even if I had, I'd never have looked into the light.

'Cause the devils, they hypnotize, beckon, and eventually draw in any who's dumb enough to look into the fires.



Gilead did not
burn half so *brightly*
as this, Roland, but
did burn for twice
as long.



Find the
remains and
read clearly
the message
therein:



Come
and get
me.

Haha-
hah!

So there it was, the challenge laid down. All of which leads us to here...

...the barely existing remains of a town off the last of the foothills.

Roland was leading a mule whose eyes were already dead and bulgin' with the heat.

The gunslinger's hair flopped and flew in the wind that now came directly from the desert with nothing to break it.

He'd been chasing the Man in Black eighteen hours a day for Lord knows how long and still couldn't gain ground on the bastard.

Then a man with wild eyes-- and more walking skeleton than man-- lurches from his hut, and Roland's hand moves toward the sandalwood stocks of his guns out of reflex.

But then...

A gunslinger!
Fore God! Hail,
gunslinger!
Well met!

I seen the
shooting-iron
and knew it
were! I knew!

I bid ye welcome,
gunslinger! I thought
all your kind had
perished from the
earth, so I did.

I thank
you for your
welcome.

Be ye
on a quest,
gunslinger?

Ay, I do
in search of
the Dark
Tower.

I'm sorry to
hear it. For none
who ever went in
search of that
black dog ever
came back.

Gunslinger...
I'd like to do ye
a favor in exchange
for one back.

Favor?

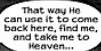
This compass
is the only thing
of value I got
left.

Take it.

How can
I take your
last object
of value?



'Cause you're gonna give it to the Man Jesus for me.



That way He can use it to come back here, find me, and take me to Heaven...



...so I can be together with my murdered kin.

You'll do this for a half-blind old man?

... As you wish.



After evil ways and evil days, the wheel of ka turns once more and the White comes again!

You mistake a *colorless* world for White, old man, and the problem with turning wheels...



...is that they tend to run people over.

Couldn't say for sure if the old man, lost in his muttering, hears him. Probably not.

Most like by the next day, he'll have forgotten the exchange and wonder where the hell his compass went.





The Man in Black never left a spoor in his wake. Not so much as a can, a bottle, a waterbag or even dung.

The only sign of his passing was the damnable burned grass, left crisscrossed in an ideographic pattern...



...which always crumbled to gray senselessness before the gunslinger's prodding hand.



The gunslinger cared not what message the Man in Black was leaving him. All that mattered...

...was gaining on him.



Southeast.
He's been heading
steadily,
relentlessly
southeast.

Like he's
being pulled
in that
direction...

...and looking
to take me along
with him.

At least I
haven't had
another bout of
that strange
dizziness I had
earlier in the
day.



Made me
feel almost
untethered
from the
world.



And why did
that momentary
dizziness make me
think of the lost
horn of Eld...

...and the last
of my friends,
dead and gone on
Jericho Hill?



No point in
dwelling on it.
Such musings
could make me
as mad as...

...as an old
man with a
compass.

Spark-a-
dark, where's
my sire?

Will I lay
me?

Will
I stay
me?

Bless
this camp
with fire.

Ay. A mad,
old man speaking
old Mid-World
rhymes. *That'll*
scare the Man in
Black right
enough.



The crazy geezer who gave Roland the compass was now but a memory from a week back.



That the mule was still moving was nothing short of miraculous.

Mule and master, both stubborn in their own way.

It seemed unlikely there'd be any more huts, but then Roland sees something and speaks words no doubt very true:



I'll be damned.

Come along, mule.



Like the mule's got a choice. Like any of us does.





He was a surprisingly young man, the dweller, and as Roland approaches, he's weeding a scrawny stand of corn with zealous abandon.



The mule lets out a wheezing grunt and he looks up, glaring blue eyes coming target center on the gunman.



He seems unarmed, but Roland, he don't assume anything.



Life for your crop.

Life for your own. Long days and pleasant nights, stranger.



And may you have twice that number.

Unlikely. I don't have nobbut corn and beans.

Brown is my name.

Screw you and the horse you rode in on.

And that's Zolton.

Beans, beans, the musical fruit. The more you eat, the more you toot.

You taught him that?

Tried to teach him the Lord's Prayer...

...but I guess this ain't Lord's Prayer country.

You're a gunlinger. That right? Thought your kind was gone.

Then you see different, don't you.

After the other one, I guess. The black cassocked priest.

Yes. How long since he passed by?

I don't know. Time's funny out here. Distance and direction, too.





Hand-dug
well, with stones
to keep the
powdery earth
from caving.



Must've taken
two years of
hauling, dragging,
laying.

Built to
last.



Hard
to believe
anything
can be.



Of course,
this *would* make
an excellent trap.
He could drop a
rock on me, break
my head...



Screw you
and the horse
you rode
in on.



Sorry. It
was rude to
specu--



I just
apologized
to a bird. I
am going
insane.



Wake up,
gunslinger.
Been out
for a good
hour.

The beans
smell good. I'll
pay for my share.
The water, too.



The water's
a gift from God,
as I think thee
knows. Pappa Doc
brings the
beans.

Oh. Your
mule has
passed on.
And dinner's
ready.

How?



Roasted
and boiled,
how else?
You picky?

No, the
mule.



It just laid
over, that's all.
It looked like an
old mule.



Zoltan at
the eyes.

Sorry.

I might have
expected it.



Poor creature
was at the end of
its endurance, only
living because it
was a habit.



Do you believe in an afterlife?



Maybe this is it.



Maybe so.



Would it be so bad?

Depends. Can we eat the bird?



Screw you, musical fruit.



Heh. Animals that talk be tough.



Birds, billy-bumblers, human beans. They be tough eatin'.



So...have you decided if I'm an enchantment yet?



The thought crossed my mind. Are you?



If I am,
I don't
know it.



So... was
that mule your
last companion
in the world?



I knew
a boy named
Sheemie once
who had a
mule.



Sheemie's
gone now,
too.

Anyone
left?

No.

They're all
gone now, and
there's only the
two of us:

We. And
the Man in
Black.



Shall I tell you
about it? Ordinarily
I'm not much of a
talker, but...



Tell me
what you
are.

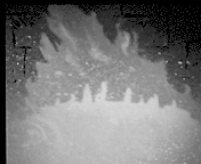
Sometimes
talking helps.
I'll listen.



Just a man.
One who means
you no harm. And
I'm still willing to
listen if you're
willing to talk.



Will you
tell me
about it?



It ended
and began
with Jericho
Hill.



And Roland starts talking about the horror of that day. The day that he and his ka-tet had been outmaneuvered and outgunned by the forces of John Farson, the so-called Good Man.

Farson had ordered that the fallen gunslingers not be mutilated...

...but Farson, he weren't there, and the celebrants got themselves so drunk in their carousing that soon they were piling the bodies of the fallen up for a huge pyre.



Keep our people
separate from the
Affiliation brats!

Wouldn't want
the stink of *their*
corpses mixing
with our brave
Fallen!

They're gonna
see the smoke for
miles, don't'cha
think?!

Hell yes!
And they'll know,
from one end of
the land to the
other...

...that the
gunslingers
have breathed
their last!



One by one, Farson's men
set the pyres alight...

...and they dance and celebrate,
and it's like a preview of what a
party in perdition must look like.

And then, just before they can
light up the pile that Roland's
body is flopped over on...



You! You
are summoned
by the order of
John Farson!

Me?



All of us!
Immediately!

Fine. But if
Farson complains
about the stink in
the morning...



...don't
go blaming
me.





TO BE CONTINUED

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES.



Dear Fellow Constant
Readers:

Welcome to the first issue of our new Dark Tower saga. Gilead has fallen, the Affiliation's finest have been massacred at the Battle of Jericho Hill, yet our protagonist, Roland Deschain, has miraculously survived. And perhaps the word *miraculous* is an even more apt description than we may suspect. For how many men are mistaken for corpses and thrown onto funeral pyres, only to rise again like avenging furies? Like many heroes before him, Roland has become very skilled at outwitting death. Although almost all of his boyhood companions are now ash and smoke, Roland refuses to follow them to the clearing while his quest remains unfinished. He is determined to reach that field of red roses where the Dark Tower stands, and when he enters that imposing edifice he will climb to the top and demand justice from whatever god or demon

resides there. And when that justice is done, Gilead will live again, and Roland's departed companions will rise from the dead and he will embrace them once more . . . or so he hopes.

If you are like me, you have awaited this moment with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. For years I have known that the last of Roland's youth would burn on a funeral pyre atop Jericho Hill, but I also knew that the man who escaped those corpse flames was destined to become something very different from the angry but idealistic boy we first met in *The Gunslinger Born*. If I ever got the chance to plot another thirty-issue story arc (which I fervently hoped would happen), I would have to show how a boy so completely devoted to his ka-tet could become the bitter, lonely, and dangerous drifter we meet in the first of the Dark Tower novels. How in the world could I even begin to undertake such a gargantuan task? Well, what you hold in your hands is my attempt to do just that.

Moving from the end of *The Battle of Jericho Hill* to the beginning of *The Gunslinger: The Journey Begins* was a dizzying task. While plotting the first Dark Tower series I felt that I had many signposts to guide me. I knew that after Roland



and his friends escaped Hambry they would have to trek through forests and across the Xay River before they reached Gilead. I knew that Roland's mind would be lost inside Maerlyn's Grapefruit, and that our tet's homecoming would not be easy. Roland was destined to kill his treacherous mother, Cort would be poisoned, and Roland's father would be killed by a traitor's knife. Gilead had to fall, and the shadow of Jericho Hill loomed large. But of the twelve years following the Battle of Jericho Hill, I knew very little. Of course I was familiar with the names of some of the adversaries Roland would encounter while casting about for the trail of the Man in Black, and I knew in great detail his dangerous liaison with a certain otherworldly lady in Eluria (which I will not discuss now!) but otherwise, I was in the dark. And to tell you the truth, despite so many years of traveling unknown roads with Roland, such darkness makes me profoundly uneasy.

How could I bridge those undocumented years? How could I segue from Roland, the dinh of a powerful ka-tet, to Roland, the drifter? How could I smoothly transport our tale from the fertile Mid-World of Roland's youth to the ruined landscape of the Mohaine Desert? And scariest of all, how could I open the story told in *The Gunslinger* when we had already used the famous first line of that novel as an opening for *The Gunslinger Born*? (*The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed...*) I approached these daunting tasks the way writers have always had to approach formidable obstacles—one word at a time.

Luckily for me, these Dark Tower comics have two fabulous editors—Ralph Macchio and Mike Horwitz. To my fear that we might repeat ourselves by opening *The Journey Begins* in the same way that we opened *The Gunslinger*

Born, they had the perfect answer. Let's use that repetition in an interesting fashion. Let's purposefully echo the beginning of *The Gunslinger Born*, but let's try to add some extra layers of meaning. Their words got me thinking. In fact, by the time I returned to my word processor, my brain was spinning so fast that smoke was probably coming out of my ears. In the opening of *The Gunslinger Born*, we had emphasized Roland's pursuit of the Man in Black. But in *The Journey Begins*, I wanted to stress that while Roland is chasing his enemy, the Man in Black is quite purposefully leading Roland on. The difference is subtle, but also profound. Here is an excerpt from that part of my original outline:

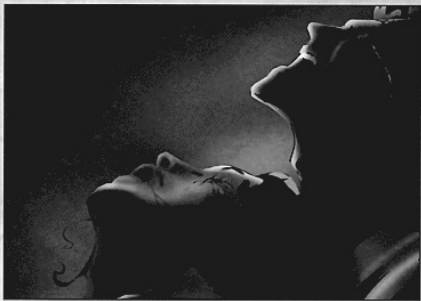
As Ralph and Mike suggested, let's begin this new arc by playing off the opening pages of *The Gunslinger Born*... only we'll add a new twist! The Man in Black (aka Marten/Walter) is a sorcerer, and he's playing his own game with Roland, so let's make use of this information. (As Peter mentioned in the earlier opening, the Man in Black is a sly old fox. In fact, we're going to see him demonstrate his slyness

over and over in this 30 issue story.)

1. Perhaps we could begin by echoing those first two pages of *The Gunslinger Born*, both in imagery, color, and panel set-up. However, maybe we could alter the scenery a little bit so that readers realize that we're dropping into our story at a slightly different time and in a slightly different place. Maybe we could start with that blazing sun, and then pull back and see vultures (or crows/ravens) eating a corpse. Only this time the corpse is of a taheen—a creature with the body of a man but the head of a raven. (NOTE: This taheen is mentioned at the beginning of the 2003 version of *The Gunslinger*, so it will be a neat little nod to those hardcore fans who have read every version of the tale.) If we want to get graphic, we could have the taheen utter some last words as the crows pick out his eyes . . .

2. Perhaps we can change the scenery a little bit as well, so that we get a sense that we have entered a different section of the Dark Tower timeline and are witnessing a different day of that endless pursuit. We can still have that weird foggy light, but now perhaps we can see a faint, cloudy haze of mountains etched upon the distant horizon and scant, ragged patches of devil-grass growing up through the hardpan? (This is the scenery we





find at the beginning of *The Gunslinger*.)

3. Let's reintroduce the "man in ebony" that we saw at the beginning of *TGB*, only let's alter his gait. In this version of the tale, he isn't running any longer. He is walking with a purposeful stride. However, since he is moving directly into that foggy sunlight, we can't quite make out *who* he is. Is he Roland . . . or the Man in Black?

4. Maybe we still see a close-up of the boot and the glove, as we do on page 2 of *TGB*. Only this time, as our unknown protagonist kneels down, he doesn't lift up a handful of sand but begins to lay a campfire. He places the bits of ironwood, devil grass, and animal bones in a shape that looks like a small and complex double chimney, about two feet high. (NOTE: I based the shape of this campfire on the one that Walter/the Man in Black builds at the end of *The Gunslinger*, when he and Roland palaver in the golgotha near the Western Sea.)

5. Our big splash page(s) show us the identity of our protagonist. It is not

Roland we are following, but THE MAN IN BLACK! In this image, the Man in Black stands next to his campfire; the red setting sun glows behind him like an evil halo. The fire by his side blazes, and in its white core we can see beckoning devils. (Whenever devil-grass is burned, these demons appear.) The dream-smoke of this fire blows out toward the desert waste. The wind is constant, and dust-devils swirl over the hardpan. (Although all of these demonic entities are Mid-World spirits and are mentioned at the beginning of *The Gunslinger*, placing them around Walter will be a graphic representation of his evil sorcery.)

6. The camera closes in on the fire, and on the Man in Black's hand, as it passes over the flames. We catch his hand halfway over the fire—dousing the flames as it passes.

7. In the place of the fire, we now see a magical ideograph, though what this ideograph might mean, we have no idea. *A message for you, gunslinger*, the Man in Black says. And then he laughs.



8. Still silhouetted by the red setting sun, the Man in Black raises his arms to the sky. He fades away before our eyes, like a mirage . . . or a supernatural entity.

And as for how to segue from Jericho Hill to the Mohaine Desert, the answer all of a sudden seemed obvious. The first section of the original *Gunslinger* novel is told in flashback—Roland is recounting his adventures to a desert dweller named Brown. Hence, all we had to do was flashback further—not to the horrors that Roland experienced in a town called Tull, *but all the way back* to the horrors of Jericho Hill. And to segue from Roland, the *dinh* of a tet to Roland, the loner, let's *witness* his bereavement. As Mike Horwitz suggested, let's see him bid goodbye to all of his dead friends lying atop that pyre, *especially* Aileen. But each time I started visualizing that scene, my favorite bit of *Carrie* flashed before my eyes. What if one of

Roland's companions isn't *quite* dead? What if a hand reaches out of that *pyre* and grabs him...?

Anyway, my fellow Constant Readers, I hope you have enjoyed this tale. And thanks, as always, for staying with us. Roland appreciates your company, and so do we.

Long days and pleasant
nights—

Robin Furth

WRITTEN BY:
ROBIN FURTH
ILLUSTRATED BY:
DENNIS CALERO

**DARK TOWER:
THE GUNSLINGER
THE JOURNEY BEGINS
ISSUE #1
SKETCHBOOK**

A look at Eisner nominated artist Sean Phillips' in-progress work for his first issue of DARK TOWER.

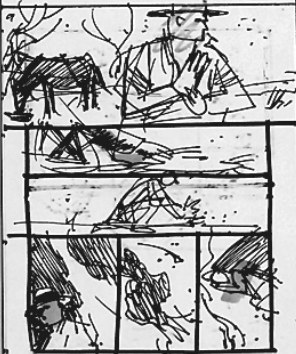
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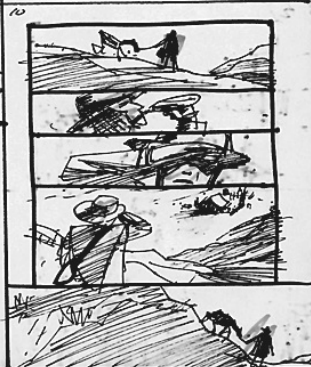
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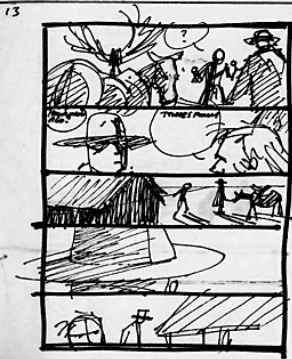


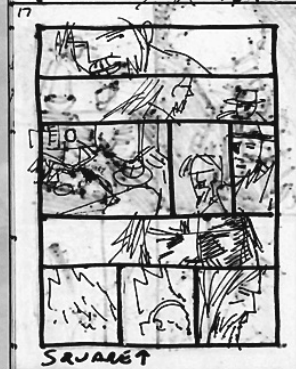
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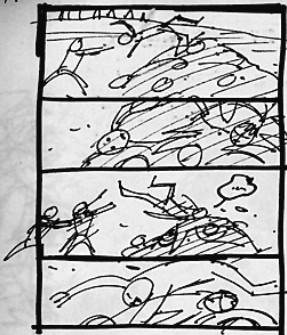
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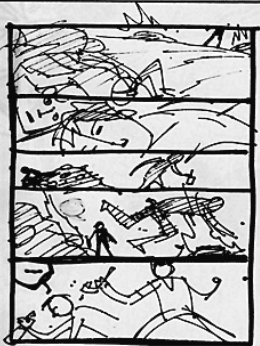
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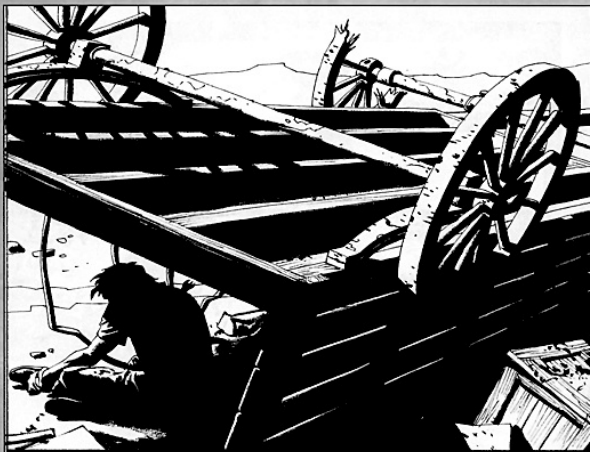
SEAN'S ORIGINAL BLACK AND WHITE ART FOR THIS ISSUE'S COVER,
FEATURING ROLAND AND THE GHOST OF SUSAN DELGADO.



DARK TOWER:
THE GUNSLINGER
THE JOURNEY BEGINS
ISSUE #2
PREVIEW











NEXT

THEY SAY DYING IS EASIER THE SECOND TIME AROUND





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, has seen his father's Affiliation fall to the Good Man's forces. With his ka-tet murdered and Gilead in ruins, the troubled Deschain is now truly alone for the first time in his life. But there is hope: Roland stalks the deserts in search of the Man in Black, who holds the key to righting this out-of-synch world. What lies in wait for the world's last gunslinger, though, no seeing sphere could portend...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life comes a new phase in the saga of the last gunslinger. This is a dark chronicle of revenge, lust, betrayal, and destiny—a cosmic quest that could only be conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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